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CIA denies giving aid to war crimes suspect

By BOB DORN

Egors Laipeniks, former local high school track coach who has been linked to the deaths of thousands of Latvian Jews in World War II, never received aid from the Central Intelligence Agency in fighting deportation, top officials said here yesterday.

CIA Director George Bush and his principal assistant, Andrew T. Falkiewicz, who visited San Diego yesterday, described Laipeniks' connection with the agency, reported by the Evening Tribune last month, as minor.

"He had been of some use many, many years ago," Falkiewicz said.

Neither Bush nor his assistant would elaborate.

Asked whether the CIA has employed any other people suspected of participating in Nazi atrocities, Bush and Falkiewicz indicated they knew of none.

But Bush added, "If it were in my knowledge, I'm not sure I'd tell you. The law prohibits me from discussing agency methods."

Laipeniks is one of a number of people who in the past three years

have been investigated for possible deportation by the Immigration and Naturalization Service because of wartime activities.

Laipeniks has denied accusations by investigators of Nazi atrocities including Israel's war crimes department, that he was responsible for the deaths of Jews in Latvia.

Among papers acquired from Laipeniks by the Evening Tribune last month were CIA letters to him and to the INS indicating he had worked for the agency.

Laipeniks has said he was flown to Washington, D.C., several times, and to Japan, San Francisco and Alaska on agency business and at agency expense while he was a coach of the Mexican Olympic team during the years 1964-67.

Laipeniks asked the CIA for help after he said he was contacted by immigration authorities and told he was being investigated. The CIA has confirmed it wrote the letters in Laipeniks' possession.

"The only problem with Laipeniks," Falkiewicz said, was that some people wanted to say the CIA was trying to keep him from being deported.

"Somebody (apparently referring to Laipeniks) had simply inquired, 'What's going on?' Next time, I suppose we'll tell them to make their own phone call (to the INS)," Falkiewicz said.

Bush also said he has no plans to remain as CIA director, even if President-elect Jimmy Carter asks him to.

"Because of the many problems the CIA and the intelligence community has faced, it's important the President and the director have a close personal relationship," Bush said.

He said that since last summer, he has been briefing Carter on intelligence strategy and problems, and added that "I've probably talked to President-elect Carter more than any other Washington official."

He termed Carter "very well-versed on the major strategy questions."

Speaking at a lunch meeting of the Comstock Club yesterday in Sacramento, Bush said Congress has a right to know what is in the CIA budget, but the public doesn't have such a right.

"Every single penny of the CIA budget is reported to the proper committees of Congress," Bush said.

But, he added, that spending figure is "not going to be, as long as I'm director, reported to the people because I don't believe that you can

lay out innermost details of our intelligence and still have an intelligence capability that's meaningful."